



## The guidelines of good life: An inquiry in the light of Dhammapada text

Dr. Shantaraj Debbarma

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Adwaita Malla Barman Smriti Mahavidyalaya, Amarpur, Tripura, India

### Abstract

Good life is not something ideal; it is purely practical and possible. Different thinkers have different views on the good life. Traditionally it is believed that there are three types of lifestyle i.e., life of pleasure, political life and virtuous life. Some thinkers opine that a pleasurable life is a good life. The Carvaka and Epicurean school of philosophy believed in a pleasurable life. Some political philosophers express that political life is a good life, where power and honor are more important than the exercise of possessed virtue. And some thinkers believe that a virtuous life is a good life. Buddha and Aristotle believed in it. According to them only the possession of virtue is not enough, the exercise of virtues is also required to attain a good life. The common thing is that everyone accepts that to live a good life is possible. But their meaning of good life is different from each other. There is no doubt that we are facing countless problems in our life. We have to survive by facing these problems. Just as our thoughts and actions cause our problems, so do the actions of our neighbors affect our lives. What is the right way to deal with problems? In which way we have to solve the problems for living a good life or happy life. Happiness is loved by all. Everyone wants happiness. But the question is how we can achieve happiness? What kind of actions should we do to attain happiness? What kind of activities helps us to attain a good life or happy life? In this paper, I have tried to explore and analyze what a good life is and how it can be attained in reference to Dhammapada text. The Dhammapada text is widely esteemed text in the Pali Tipitaka, the sacred scripture of Theravada Buddhism. It is believed by Theravada Buddhism that Dhammapada was originally spoken by the Buddha in response to a particular episode.

**Keywords:** Good life, Dhammapada, happiness, nirvana, love, karma, concentration etc

### Introduction

What is life? Does life have a purpose? What is a good life? Is a happy life a good life? What is happiness? How to be happy? Is society required for attaining happiness? Can we live a happy life by living alone? The Dhammapada is a guideline to good living. The main purpose of Buddha's teaching is to solve the problems or sufferings of human beings and welfare of human beings at present life, fortunate rebirth and to achieve the ultimate good i.e., Nirvana or liberation. Hate is an obstacle to living a good life. If we want to conquer this hatred, it must be conquered not by hatred but by love. Buddha said true conquest of hatred is achieved by non-hatred, by forbearance and by love. He also said that for living a good life, good Karma or action is necessary. Karma is not a fate; it is a manifestation of intention expressed by deeds and speech. It is ethically two type viz. Unwholesome and wholesome Karma. Acting out of hatred, delusion and greed are some examples of unwholesome Karma. The actions which are performed for goodness for oneself and others, apathetic or detached action and the actions which are done by full realization of the situation are called wholesome actions. It is this action or karma that determines a person's rebirth. Wholesome actions bring rebirth in higher levels and unwholesome actions are the cause of rebirth in lower forms. But the main purpose of life according to Buddha is to attain Nirvana by destroying the repeated birth and death circle. So, the good life means performing the wholesome actions with the aim of attaining Nirvana or liberation – the complete cessation of sufferings and problems.

**Karma and Nirvana:** The Dhammapada is a practical corollary which recognize the law of karma, set the ethical injunction for abstaining evil and cultivating the good and

show the path i.e. moral discipline, right concentration and wisdom including right understanding and thought of attaining the natural desire i.e., happiness – the Nirvana. There are four stages of nirvana. The first stage is called sotapatti or stream-entry. In this stage the disciple enters upon the path of liberation. He receives the first glimpse of deathless. The second stage is called saka-dagami or once-returner. In this stage the disciple returned to the world after viewing the path of liberation. The third one is anagami or non-returner. In this stage the disciple never returns to human existence, and lives in the celestial plane. And the final and fourth stage is that of the Arahat, the perfected one. He accomplished the path of liberation, he freed himself from all kinds of suffering and bondage, and he broke the cycle of birth and death. The ideal super hero as depicted in the Dhammapada.

Those who understand death and realize that one day we all will die, they do not quarrel with anyone. They settle and solve their quarrels. The right way of living is to enjoy life by doing good deeds and without depriving anyone from living harmoniously and peacefully. Pleasure, Happiness, delights etc. come in our life when we act good. The good actions are the actions which bring happiness to himself and other fellow citizens of the society. So, happiness and good actions are the most essential parts of our life. Without these our life is not complete. To study the sacred texts i.e. the Sutta Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka is a good habit but the more good habit is to practice the teaching of these sacred texts in daily life. This practice will help to get rid from the hatred, greed and lust and guide the person to the path of wisdom.

**A controlled mind is a source of happiness:** Buddha said if we want to achieve happiness, we must tame and guard

our mind. A tamed and guarded mind brings happiness. No one can help anyone in attaining happiness, not even parents or close relatives. One's own well-directed mind can only help in attaining happiness. We must avoid the association of wickedness and companionship of evil people. We must seek the companionship of good friends and noble people who always perform good action. If we are with good people, we also gradually become good people. Drop by drop the water pot is filled, likewise the person who does good actions makes himself good little by little. To become a good and happy person one should avoid both praise and blame. Wise are not affected by praise or blame. A person should act in such a way that praise does not make him arrogant and public censure does not deter him from doing good actions. Moreover, a person must be virtuous, and does not do evil actions for himself or others and does not want to achieve success by unjust ways.

A salvation-seeker man should live in such a way that he does not sink into the world even if he is in the world. Just as a swan does not drown in water, a salvation-seeker person should remain indifferent to the world. Only then he can be happy. He should be restrained in speech as well as in action. One should speak only that which brings peace and harmony. It is better to say one word which brings peace than a thousand useless words hearing that one does not attain peace. And worshiping a perfected mind is far better than a century sacrificial ceremony. Perfected mind means the knowledge and teaching which brings peace and tranquility in an individual and collective life. We have to make the habit of doing the good thing by doing again and again so that he can find pleasure in that action, because blissful is the accumulation of good. The good life is to live a virtuous, strenuous, resolute and meditative life. The good life is the life where we can see the deathless and the supreme truth.

**Respect for all living beings:** In the Dhammapada text it is clearly said that if we want to live a happy and good life then we should not harm or kill other living beings or even do not use harsh words to anyone. Life is dear to all. If you kill or harm other people, you spoil that person's joy of living. And if he attacks you, then your joy of living will be destroyed. So, Buddha called to live peacefully without hurting anyone by respecting every creature. A person who prevents another person from attaining happiness or creates any kind of hindrance can never be happy. Buddha said one cannot become pure by fasting, vowing, wearing dirty clothes, lying on the ground, smearing ashes and dust on the body. To be pure one has to purify the mind and overcome doubts by calm and controlled habits. Purity and impurity depend on our actions. Nobody can purify another; we have to purify our own mind by doing good actions i.e., non-attached actions. A good life can be lived only when a pure mind is attained. So, for a good life we must be pure in mind and doubt free. We can live a good life by destroying our sufferings if we have the faith, moral purity, right knowledge and virtue.

**Desire and craving – sources of sufferings:** In the Dhammapada it is written that seeking intimacy with the beloved one can also give pain, because when you want to meet and see your loved one but cannot meet due to some reason, you will feel sad. So, the most desirable action is to control our desire, affection, attachment, lust, craving etc.

because all this springs grief. One must have to understand and realize that sensual pleasure gives little satisfaction and much pain. The wise man always avoids sensual pleasure even if they do not delight in heavenly pleasure because they realize that pleasure cannot provide a good life. In order to attain a good life we have to destroy our desire and craving because these are the main cause of our sufferings. And a life where there are sufferings cannot be a good life.

**Virtue and self-mastery:** The faults of others are easily seen but he who can see his own faults is a great man. We have to form the habit of seeing our own faults so that we can correct our behavior. We need to take a holistic view and make decisions without taking anything for granted. A wise man is one who investigates both right and wrong. A man becomes just when his judgment is based on truth and impartiality. Truthfulness, inoffensiveness, restraint, virtuous and self-mastery are the most essential characteristics for a man who wants to live a good life. When a man realizes that all conditioned things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, he turns away from suffering. Further he has to practice the quality of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, non-violence and meditation on Buddha's teaching. This is the path to a good or happy life. He who knows what is bad as bad and what is good as good enjoys a good life.

To serve the people is the best action in this world, especially to serve one's mother and father. Good is virtue, good is faith, good is restraint over the craving, good is love, good is the acquisition of knowledge and good is the avoidance of evil. He who is friendly, utters gentle, truthful words, takes nothing that is not given to him, desire-free, no-attachment is a good or holy man. Self-illusion, doubt, belief in rites and rituals, lust and ill-will these five lower fetters and the five bonds viz. greed, hatred, delusion, false views and conceit must be severed from life and the following five spiritual faculties viz. Faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom must be cultivated in order to live a good life.

## Conclusion

Good life is not something where there are no problems or sufferings, but to acquire the ability to deal with problems is a good life. All that we are is the result of what we have thought. It is made up of our thoughts. Our thoughts create our world. If a person thinks and acts good, his life will also be good. Good deeds will follow him like a shadow. To have a good and happy life, we have to remember and act the following paths:

- No one can live a good or happy life by engaging in hatred. He who seeks happiness in the misery of others never finds true happiness, because where there is hatred and sorrow there is no happiness.
- The most necessary action for a good life is to conquer hatred. No one can be good by hating someone. A good life requires learning to love.
- We can enjoy a good life by doing Wholesome and detached action. It is the wholesome action that drives man towards his ultimate goal of life – the Nirvana.
- Good deeds and knowledge bring happiness and prosperity in human life. No happiness can be gained by hurting others.
- To study the sacred texts i.e. the Sutta Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka is surely a

good habit, but only study is not enough, to practice the teaching of these sacred texts in daily life is more necessary for living a good life.

- The mind must be controlled and directed in the right direction for that we need to spend more time with good friends and wise people.
- Life should be spent in such a way that external things do not stir the mind. Just as a duck does not drown in water, in the same way, care must be taken not to sink into worldly affairs. You have to awaken your main purpose of life.
- To worship knowledge is far better to worship any other things or any sacrificial ceremony or fasting, vowing, wearing dirty clothes, lying on the ground, smearing ashes and dust on the body, because only knowledge, purity of mind and love can provide a good and peaceful life.
- One cannot enjoy a good life by being immersed in carnal pleasures. We have to control our sensual desires for a good life.
- To practice the quality of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, non-violence and meditation on Buddha's teaching are the path of a good life.

Finally, we have to say that the feeling of I-ness and my-ness must be destroyed to attain a good life. Buddha said, "Overcome the anger by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth." The right knowledge about the world and the living beings and the ability to act according to that knowledge can give us a good life.

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